

ICASA 2021

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA | 6-11 DEC. 2021

Press Release by Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA): 29th November 2021 EMBARGO: None (For immediate release)

The Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA), organizers of the International Conference on AIDS & STIs in Africa (ICASA) is highly concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging new variant (Omicron). As we approach the 21st edition of the International Conference on AIDS and STI's (ICASA) hosted by South Africa in less than 6 days, we are concerned with the impact of COVID -19 variant on the health and welfare of South Africans and those planning to attend the conference held from the 6th to the 10th of December 2021 at the International Convention Centre in Durban Kwazulu Natal.

In line with his Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa declaration to the citizens of his Nation on the 28th of November 2021, the Society for AIDS in Africa custodians and organisers of ICASA following its emergency Council Meeting Board held on the 28th of November 2021 strongly condemn the unacceptable travel ban imposed on travelers to and from Southern Africa and other Southern African countries despite the World Health Organization's warning against countries' hastily imposing travel restrictions. The World Health Organization had encouraged global leaders to look to a "risk-based and scientific approach" for the management of the pandemic.

The Society for AIDS in Africa, upholds the recommendations of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the Africa Union Members State and health authorities released on the 26th of November 2021, and the statement of the South Africa Republic Alert Level 1 Regulations confirmed in President Ramaphosa's speech of the 28th of November 2021 stating that in South Africa:

- There is still a curfew in place from 12:00 midnight to 4:00AM.
- No more than 750 people may gather indoors and no more than 2,000 people may gather outdoors. Where the venue is too small to accommodate these numbers with appropriate social distancing, then no more than 50 per cent of the capacity of the venue may be used.
- No more than 100 people are permitted at a funeral, and night vigils, after-funeral gatherings and 'after-tears' gatherings are not allowed.
- The wearing of masks in public places is still mandatory, and failure to wear a mask when required remains a criminal offence.
- The sale of alcohol is permitted according to the regular license conditions but may not be sold during curfew hours.

The Society for AIDS in Africa would like to inform all partners, stakeholders, delegates, and the international community, that ICASA 2021 is a hybrid conference that will convene a maximum of 600 to 750 in-person and over 3000 virtual participants.

The Durban International Convention Centre, venue for ICASA 2021 has a seating capacity of over 5000 in-person delegates. Currently only 400 delegates have opted for in-person attendance with over 2500 opting for virtual participation. As part of measures to control and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the conference, there will be no community village. This is the first time since the inception of ICASA where there will only be a community session hall for the activities of the various networking zones. The Community session hall can only host **100 physically present delegates**.

The ICASA 2021 programme has also been reviewed and all sessions now run for a maximum of 45 minutes with a maximum of three speakers. This will ensure that participants do not spend more than an hour within any enclosed space (session room). As such the timelines of the ICASA 2021 programme has been revised to adhere strictly to stipulated COVID-19 protocols. ICASA sessions will run from 08:45am – 4:12pm (SAT) each day of the ICASA 2021 conference week.

Delegates are hereby advised to adhere strictly to all COVID-19 protocols. **Social distancing, wearing of face masks covering nose and mouth and providing proof of complete COVID-19 vaccination are**

compulsory for all delegates to be able to have access to the conference venue. However, in case there is a declaration of steep rise in the number of COVID-19 infection cases by the host country, the ICASA 2021 conference will be fully virtual as stipulated in the ICASA 2021 cancelation policy. Onsite COVID-19 screening and testing will be conducted before and upon exit of the conference. The conference organizers are currently in the process of negotiating to have COVID-19 test done onsite. **The Society for AIDS in Africa would like to reassure his community, that despite the reported cases of a new COVID-19 variant, ICASA 2021 will still take place as planned.** The general public should be informed that the government of South Africa and Society for AIDS in Africa, will not spare any effort to guarantee their safety and wellbeing. Organizers also ask that those planning to travel are aware of travel regulations on return to their country of origin.

Kindly see below link to ICASA 2021 Health & Safety measures.

Link: <http://icasa2021.saafrica.org/docs/ICASA%202021%20Attendee%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Measures.pdf>

For more information about ICASA please contact:

Luc Armand Bodea

ICASA Director/SAA Coordinator

Email: lucbodea@saafrica.org

Permanent Secretariat

Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA)

Office Direct: (+233)(0) 303 936 814

Mobile (+233) (0) 543 748 781

Email: info@saafrica.org

Accra- Ghana

The Society for AIDS in Africa was founded in 1989 at the fourth International Symposium on AIDS and Associated Cancers in Africa (now ICASA) held in Marseille France by a group of African scientists, activists, and advocates in response to the HIV epidemic. The establishment of the Society was the effect of the agitations of some African scientists for the conference to be organized on African soil. These agitations began in the preceding year at the third meeting held in Arusha, Tanzania in 1988. The cause of these scientists was supported by the then Director of WHO, Dr. Peter Piot.

At the 1990 conference held in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an Executive Committee was inaugurated to oversee the establishment of the Society and to coordinate subsequent International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) conferences. The society was officially registered in Nairobi, Kenya with a functional Secretariat in Nigeria. The permanent secretariat of the Society for AIDS in Africa was established in 2009 in Accra – Ghana.